

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 6, 2021

8:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair
Representative Dan Ortiz
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 47

"An Act renaming the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council as the Council for Alaska Native Languages; and relating to the Council for Alaska Native Languages."

- MOVED HB 47 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 47

SHORT TITLE: COUNCIL FOR ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) STORY

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	TRB, STA
04/06/21	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 47.

SANDRA MOLLER, Director

Division of Community of Regional Affairs

Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 47.

LANCE TWITCHELL

Associate Professor of Alaska Native Languages

University of Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions during the hearing on HB 47.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:30:35 AM](#)

CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Representatives Cronk, Ortiz, Tarr (via teleconference), and Zulkosky were present at the call to order. Representative Fields arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 47-COUNCIL FOR ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES

[8:31:23 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 47, "An Act renaming the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council as the Council for Alaska Native Languages; and relating to the Council for Alaska Native Languages."

[8:31:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 47. She stated that the council was first developed as the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council; HB 47 would shorten its name and expand its membership. The council provided recommendations to both the governor and the Alaska State Legislature on programs, policies and projects, and networked in support of the council's mission of advocating for the survival and revitalization of Alaska Native languages through collaboration and sharing, she imparted. The council was created by the second session of the Twenty-Seventh Alaska State Legislature and consisted of governor-appointed voting members who were language experts representing diverse regions of the state, she shared. There were also two non-voting members, she added: one member of the

Senate, appointed by the Senate president; and one member of the House, appointed by the speaker of the House. Representative Story shared she herself served as the non-voting member of the House, which was how the information which became HB 47 had been brought to her.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY shared the two seemingly small changes brought about by HB 47 had significant meaning for the council. The name change would simplify the name from the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council to the Council for Native Languages, which would reflect the goal of sustaining and reinvigorating Alaska Native language, "a concept that [went] beyond preservation." The second change requested the addition of two new members, changing the number of voting members from five to seven. Alaska has about 20 distinct indigenous languages, she shared, and to be able to be more inclusive, two more members would add additional perspective.

[8:35:35 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:35 a.m. to 8:36 a.m.

[8:36:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked for an explanation of the fiscal note.

[8:36:18 AM](#)

SANDRA MOLLER, Director, Division of Community of Regional Affairs, Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development, explained the reason for the fiscal notes was to allow the two additional members two trips per year.

[8:38:02 AM](#)

LANCE TWITCHELL, Associate Professor of Alaska Native Languages, University of Alaska, testified in support of HB 47. He said sufficient work had not been done in terms of the progress of Alaska Native languages. He shared that when the council was formed in 2012, members felt seen and heard, but subsequently budget cuts had been made, reports had gone unread, and actions seemed less courageous. In the case of some languages, fewer than 10 speakers remained, he shared, referring to them as a "death spiral." He urged passage of HB 47 to preserve and care for not just languages, but entire systems of communication and ways of life.

[8:43:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked what could be done fundamentally to advance the cause of preservation of Native languages.

MR. TWITCHELL suggested that working with the Department of Education and Early Development to create an Alaska Native Language Schools consortium might be a step in the right direction, as it would create a clear path to legitimize space for teachers of Native languages.

[8:47:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how the legislature should be using state-funded media to support language revitalization.

MR. TWITCHELL replied that public broadcasting could be used to greater effect with utilization of Native language content for radio stations and program development. When the Juneau community radio station KTOO brought the Sesame Street character Elmo to Juneau, he shared, and Elmo was taught how to say "Gunalchéesh," it really went a long way with folks.

[8:50:41 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked if there was an opportunity to ensure there could be movement of the necessary request and opt for virtual meetings and thus avoid the fiscal impact if that would be favorable.

MR. TWITCHELL said he thought so, but he couldn't speak for the council.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked at what point the department could reduce the fiscal note if the council could meet virtually.

MS. MOLLER replied she wasn't sure exactly but was sure it could be done.

[8:54:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ expressed a desire that HB 47 be moved from committee.

[8:55:09 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:55 a.m. to 8:58 a.m.

[8:58:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ moved to report HB 47 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 47 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs.

[8:59:23 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 8:59 a.m.